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12/9/76

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Date and Time: December 9, 1976, 5:00 p.m.

Place : Office of the Minister, Buenos Aires

Participants: Minister of Interior, Brig. Gen. Albano
E. Harguindeguy
Charles E. Bray, Deputy Asst. Sec., ARA
Maxwell Chaplin, DCM

Subject: Conversation with Argentine Interior Minister

This meeting took place at the instance of the Minister. When Mr. Bray had seen the Minister's Deputy on December 6, the latter had suggested that a later meeting with the Minister would be constructive. The Minister's attitude throughout the conversation was warmly cordial, relaxed, and responsive.

Mr. Bray reviewed his reasons for visiting Argentina, observing that the degree of misunderstanding of current developments in the U.S. had resulted in his talking more and listening less than he had originally planned. He detailed the emergence in the U.S. of a desire to express and apply traditional American values not only in domestic affairs, but in foreign relations as well. In this connection he noted that it would be a serious misjudgment to consider Father Drinan or Rep. Fraser as captives of the left. He stressed that Rep. Fraser was a serious student of foreign affairs who fairly reflected the views and interests of his Minnesota constituents. Minnesota is a State which has provided some of the U.S.'s most prominent idealistic politicians. In sum, the GOA should view the U.S. interest in human rights as a genuine and sincere manifestation of political will and should seek to deal with its expression in foreign relations in ways which would minimize conflict between our two countries.

In the exchange of remarks on the recent visit of Father Drinan, both participants observed that the visit had gone better than either government had initially anticipated and Mr. Bray stated that in his speech of November 30 on

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Argentina Father Drinan showed that, while still highly critical of the GOA, he understood the complexities of the current situation in this country.

Mr. Bray asked the Minister if he might assure interested people in the United States that prospective witnesses before the Fraser committee would not be harrassed by the Argentine legislation under which witnesses Roca and Garzon Maceda were indicted. The Minister replied that there would be no prosecutions provided that the witnesses did not urge sanctions against Argentina.

The Minister noted that visits of open-minded observers to Argentina could only be helpful and that the President of the International Red Cross was currently in Argentina arranging for a visit of an IRC team for the following month. He said that this team would be given complete freedom of access to all prisoners and jails in the country and would visit the entire country (this conflicts only slightly--with regard to the date of the visit--with the information contained in B.A. 7971). He then raised the possibility of a visit from Congressman Fraser, saying that the GOA would welcome such a visit. Mr. Bray queried the Minister whether Congressman Fraser might expect to have security problems from one sector or another. The Minister scoffed at this prospect, assuring that Fraser's security would be totally guaranteed.

Bray then said that in considering a visit by Congressman Fraser or encouraging representative Argentines to appear as witnesses before that committee, the GOA might well give some prior thought to the types of questions which might be raised. For instance, the committee would be most interested in evidence that individuals in the security forces who had committed violations of human rights are being prosecuted. The Minister did not respond directly to this invitation to cite instances of such punishment. He observed that even in a "clean" war declared and fought by uniformed armies on both sides excesses inevitably occurred. In a "dirty" war such as the one in which GOA was currently engaged, the pressures and possibilities for excesses were vastly greater.

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Mr. Bray said that the committee would also be interested in why the GOA had not found it possible to publish a list of those detained by the security forces. The Minister responded volubly that this issue had finally moved ahead. At that very moment the government was publishing the names of 198 individuals recently released by the security forces. The Minister had only recently obtained the President's approval (which he had long been seeking) to publish lists of detained.

Such lists would be published in the following form: for each three month period starting in October 1974, the government would publish a list of the numbers of individuals detained under the State of Seige Power, the numbers released, and the names of those still imprisoned. These trimestrial lists would be published periodically and he hoped they would reach a current state (that is, would cover the most recent trimester) by April 1977. He discussed this development with evident pride and presented it as a personal victory over opposing forces which had heretofore convinced President Videal no such list should be published. (His statement flatly contradicted that made by the President's Secretary General, General Villarreal at luncheon earlier the same day. Villarreal said that for security reasons no lists of detained would be published.)

MChaplin/pm

Distribution: Amb Hill
DCM - MChaplin
Mr. Bray - ARA

Cleared by Mr. Bray (in draft)

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